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CONVOCATION ADDRESS

TO

The Madras Forest College, Coimbatore

by

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Sri Ranganathan, Ladies and Gentlemen and Graduates of the year,

It is a matter of great pleasure to me to have been asked to preside over today's function, attended by so distinguished a gathering, including experts and technicians, and to give away certificates, and prizes to the students of the Madras Forest College, who are completing today a strenuous course of a two-year training. I am fully conscious of my shortcomings; and being merely a lawyer and a politician, I claim, however, no more than a nodding acquaintance with the trends of Forest administration, the broad outlines of its development and the importance of forest wealth in India's economy. It is, therefore, with mixed feeling of diffidence and gratefulness that I choose to address you this evening. I, however, consider it a signal honour to me to be associated with today's function and deliver the Convocation Address.

2. I need hardly tell you that this great country of ours is primarily agricultural, and it is just now trying to build up its shattered economy. Agriculture and forestry form the backbone of India's rural life. The former, as you are aware, is the biggest industry of our country, and forestry comes next to it. The importance of forests and forestry is specially great in a country as ours, where agriculture is the primary occupation of a majority of its population.

3. Forests have played an important part in the history of our nation. They inspired our sages and saints in the dawn of our civilization. Nay, our ancient and hoary literature and culture had their birth and reached their efflorescence in the sanctuaries of our sylvan glades. Epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata were composed within the green solitudes of Vindhyas and Himalayas, while our great men and heroes wove poetry and philosophy, romance and history in the serene quietude of our hills and woods.

4. Forests are the national assets of a country. They provide us with innumerable products so essential and indispensable for our domestic life as well as for our industrial expansion. I do not think it necessary on this occasion to touch upon the direct and indirect benefits of forests to humanity and the economy of a country. They are undeniably great and hence the essential need for an immensity of forest

wealth. It is only too true that we do not possess it in such abundance as we desire. Our resources are poor. The total forest area in India, taken as a whole, comes only to roughly 22 per cent. or about 1/5th of the total area of the country while the accepted minimum for a prosperous and balanced economy on a national level is 25 per cent. to 33 per cent., *i.e.*, 1/4th to 1/3rd of the total area. A detailed study of the statistics would show that these forests are not evenly distributed as they should, but are mostly concentrated in certain States, as Andamans, Assam, Madras, Uttar Pradesh, etc., while other States fall far behind in this connection. My own State is one such, where forests cover about 15.5 per cent. of its total area. Here again forests are mainly concentrated in the eastern side comprising Telangana districts, while all the districts of Marathwada and Karnatak have only about 5 per cent. of their area covered with forests, and that too of a very poor type. The most important of our tasks should be to put to use, to the fullest extent, the resources available out of our forests on the one hand, and to create forests in such a way as to make them evenly distributed over the entire country on the other, so that all parts and all sections of our countrymen could benefit from them.

5. Short as our forest resources are, it stands to reason that this sacred treasure entrusted to us, should be preserved and conserved. People seldom realise this outstanding truth, and destroy this national wealth in an impardonably negligent manner. They fail to understand that our forests can be compared to one's bank balance, which, if not judiciously used, would shrink and ultimately exhaust, however great it may be. It is, therefore, essential that this national wealth should be controlled and managed by Government. However trained and qualified individuals may be, they cannot have either the broad outlook or the great resources which a Government can command. In fact, individual owners have tried to cash their assets, either blissfully ignorant of or callously indifferent to the effects of the denudation of forests on the country as a whole. Taking the example of my own State, I can say that wooded lands, belonging to private persons, are being cleared of tree-cover every day. It is common knowledge that vast areas, even inside Government forests are being brought under the axe in almost all the States of India, under one pretext or another. It is unfortunate that such anti-economic clearance of forests should take place under the garb of

6. Shri Ranganathan has very rightly referred to the tendency of the people at large to devastate the forest wealth of the country without hesitation and has correctly described it as one of the quear contradictions of our national life. We do regard the forest as closely bound up with our spiritual and cultural heritage and the ancient home of our Rishis. But I am afraid it is not surprising that we have lost the sylvan sense which our forefathers in ancient days, and even in recent historical age possessed, just as we have lost many other good qualities they possessed.

Looking back to the olden days, I am reminded of our ancient literature which throws some light on the forest-consciousness of our forefathers. Our Puranas and all Prabandhas contain copious references to our forest wealth. Along with beautiful descriptions of the six Ritus (seasons), we find hundreds of varieties of forest trees enumerated in the Ramayana and the Mahabharta in the course of their description of Dandaka and Naimisa Aranyas (forests). There were three kinds or categories of forests that were consciously maintained. The first is the Udyana Vana - which corresponds to our modern town or city park with extensive forest cover but mostly suited to make it a pleasure-resort. We find almost all the romantic literature of ancient India woven round these Udyanas. The second category appears to be the Tapo-vanas or the forest covered sanctuaries where the Rishis established their Ashramas-which gave full protection not only to the trees but also to the animal life. We have many instances where the kings fond of hunts and shikar strayed into these sanctuaries and violated the rules of non-violence and became the victims of the wrath of the Rishis. Even wild beasts, tigers and lions too were protected and it is only when man-eaters troubled the life of the Ashrams and the population around that the Rishis invited the kings to go on hunting expeditions. The love for trees, the care with which they were nurtured and the feeling of affection which they inspired in human beings, is most typically described by Kalidasa's Sakuntalam. Sakuntala is described as shedding tears while parting with saplings and plants and creepers she had watered with her own

hands just as she did for her favourite dear. It is not, I am sure, altogether a poetic fancy; it was a characteristic of our national life in those days. The third category was, I think, the Aranyas, the thick forests; the bigger ones were called Maharanyas. I remember having read the names of hundred of forest trees in the descriptions of Aranyas. I wonder whether all of them are or can be identified. It will not be surprising if many of them have not survived the ravages of the cruel process of denudation of forests which has resulted in the impoverishment of our national wealth.

7. It is also true as Shri Ranganathan has said, that the functions of a forester have now degenerated almost to that of a policeman. He has to do the unpleasant job of guarding the forest from encroachment by the public - that has become his major job and that is why he is unpopular - not only unpopular but is almost always depicted as a source of annoyance to the people rather than as one who is performing a legitimate duty imposed by the State. Looking back again, I see that the Department of Forestry is no British innovation and not a result of any new fangled outlook of modern times. Even in ancient days, there used to be what were called Vana palakas (guardians of forests) whom the State employed for the purpose of protection and improvement of forests. In fact, I found a small chapter on the Forest Department administration in Chanakya's [illegible] Arthasasthra along with certain rules for controlling prices and combating blackmarketing and punishments for such culprits. My friend, the Inspector General of Forests, need not be perturbed by any criticism that he or his Department is superfluous. Even in olden days there used to be a hierarchy of foresters and officers for the administration of forests.

Even as regards public interest in forests, when we look back upon our old customs and practices, we will find at least two festivals - one in spring and one in winter directly connected with excursions into forests. Vana Mahotsavas or Vana Bhojanas or picknicks formed a part of our life even till recently in my child-hood when life was not so hectic as it is to-day. This interest has to be consciously revived. It is this realization that inspired my respected friend Shri Munshi to start the campaign of Vana Mahotsava for which all forest-lovers should be grateful to him.

" Grow More Food " or to satisfy the land-hunger of the landless peasantry of the country. The solution of our food problem, to my mind, lies in the correct utilization of land and in its intensive cultivation in a systematic manner based on modern scientific methods. I, therefore, consider it necessary to clear the misconception which some people do have that agriculture is more important than pasture and pasture than forest. Such an attitude should be given up once for all. Their relative order of importance or priority is not what matters, but an understanding of their inter-dependence, and it must be realised that all of them together form a close nexus on which human life and prosperity depend. The neglect of one inevitably damages the other. In short, balanced and productive land utilization is the foundation of national prosperity. All available land in our country should be reallotted to that form of use under which it would produce most and deteriorate least. It is not an easy task, nor can it be solved overnight, but requires constant, continuous, hard and earnest endeavours from one and all. I am glad to be able to say that this tremendous, but nevertheless important work, has not been neglected by our generation. The Government of India has laid considerable stress on this aspect of land use in its recent enunciation of India's National Forest Policy, which, I am sure, all of you must have known by now. I might tell you that some of the States have gone ahead and have already constituted Land Management Boards which, in spite of various handicaps, are doing fundamental and basic work, the effects of which could be felt or measured only after the lapse of considerable time. The Government of my State is also considering the creation of a high power " Land Management and Utilization Board," which undoubtedly would go into the details of this question. It is also possible that we might create a Land Management Circle, under the Forest Department, to translate the decisions and recommendations of this Board.

8.6. Another problem which has, of late, assumed considerable importance is that of erosion. The indiscriminate extension of agriculture and consequent destruction of forests have not only deprived the local population of fuel and timber, but have also stripped the land of its natural defences against dust storms, hot devastating winds, and erosion. The role of forests in the national economy, both protective and productive, entitles forests to lay claim to an adequate share

of land. Soil erosion in peninsular India is, perhaps, not so much of a spectacular phenomenon as it is in the Siwaliks and the outer Himalayas of the Punjab and the Uttar Pradesh. Nevertheless, the ravages of erosion can amply be noticed in the Western Ghats, the best example being Nilgiris, and the Deccan Plateau. The effects of erosion and destruction of forests are evident in the form of deterioration of productivity of the soil, and formation of arid areas and deserts. The Rajputana desert, which is said to be rapidly enlarging and engulfing further areas year by year, needs special mention in this connection. Strong winds that develop in this region during summer, transport vast quantities of sand and salt from the sea and the Runn of Cutch, whipping the desert into terrific dust storms, the fury of which is felt throughout the whole of North-West India. The Marathwada and Karnatak areas of my State are other examples where absence of forests is strongly felt. Laterisation has taken place on vast areas. Top soil has been washed off, exposing the hard subsoil and making it absolutely unfit for agriculture, resulting in near famine conditions. I am pleased to state that the Forest Department of my State has taken up this mighty challenge of Nature and have drawn up a scheme of afforestation and other anti-erosion works under the Five-Year Development Plan of the State. This scheme envisages an expenditure of Rs. 21.43 lakhs over a period of five years and contemplates doing contour trenching, bunding, gully plugging and afforestation in compact patches in the districts of Bidar and Osmanabad, where erosion is at its height, at the rate of 2,500 acres every year. They have already rehabilitated about 3,650 acres so far. Your Inspector-General of Forests has recently visited this area and has congratulated the officers who have brought about a radical change in the soil cover during a brief period of less than 5 years. I am sure this useful work would be continued and the day would not be far off when this part of my State would be richly clad with forests. The Chief Conservator of Forests of my State has published a pamphlet regarding this work, copies of which he has brought with him for distribution today. He has also brought a few films regarding this work, which he would be only too glad to exhibit if you so desire.

9.1. One of the great tasks that the foresters of today are called upon to perform is the rehabilitation of our denuded forests. The mistaken belief that forests grow by themselves

and that they are public property and are therefore everybody's property and anybody is free to do what he likes, has led to the destruction of our already depleted forests. To crown it, forests are supposed to be reserves of land, available for extension of agriculture whenever wanted, very often under the Grow More Food campaign. These ideas have led the common man to believe that the Forest Departments, with their paraphernalias of professional staff, forest laws, techniques, research and forest protection are nothing but enemies of the people. Forest officers are very often taken to be no more and no worthier than middlemen who have come between the producer and the consumer, to the detriment of the interests of the latter. Let me tell you that I consider these notions to be mere delusions arising from the ignorance of the common man and fanned by the greed found in human nature. Foresters are no less patriotic than the best of the patriots in our country. In fact they are entrusted with the great responsibility of being the trustees of the richest of our national resources which is essential in multifarious ways, and forms the basis of our economic and industrial life. They are, therefore, not only answerable to the present generation but also to the generations to come.

10.8. Keeping this in view, many of the States, having as they do popular Governments, have taken over all private and Zamindari forests. In my own State all Jagirs have been abolished resulting in the taking over of Jagir forests in May, 1950. Prior to this absorption, the forest area of my State was about 9,624 sq. miles, or about 11 per cent. It has now risen to about 15.5 per cent., being about 12,822 sq. miles due to the amalgamation of about 2,915 sq. miles of Jagir forests. As I have already stated, individuals have tried to cash in the assets they possessed in the shape of forests resulting in the degeneration and diminution of the latter. It now remains for the present generation of foresters to improve and conserve these denuded and depleted forests. Efforts are being made in my State to bring such forests under systematic and scientific management, which would lead to their rejuvenation. Working Plan Parties have been strengthened to ensure that this work is completed in the shortest possible time. As you know, forestry, unlike agriculture, is a long-term enterprise, extending well beyond the average span of human life, requiring a continuity of policy and skilled management over a considerable length of time. Patient waiting is necessary

before any tangible results can be achieved. I hope and pray that our labours in this connection would bear fruit. On the Forest College, at Coimbatore, and its sister institution at Dehra Dun, devolves the responsibility of supplying the trained personnel required for the performance of this great task of husbanding our forest resources wisely and well.

11. The Madras Forest College has a distinguished record of about 35 years of having served not only the Deccan region but also Ceylon. To date, the College has turned out close on 900 Forest Rangers, manning the personnel of forest departments all over India. The importance of this College lies in the fact that it deals with forest education on a regional basis. It concentrates on the needs of peninsular India, whose conditions are vastly different from those of the rest of the country. I understand soil conservation receives special attention and rightly so, in the curriculum of this College, so that the trainees of this College are sufficiently equipped to face the task ahead of them of rehabilitating the vast stretches of barren plains and bare hills of the Deccan. Some of the chronic famine areas of our country are located in the Deccan and on the securing of a tree-cover on them will depend, to a great extent, the mitigation of famine conditions that have now become so common a feature of our economy. In this connection, I cannot but commend the *Vana Mahotsava* drive of Sri K. M. Munshi, as Union Minister for Forests, Food and Agriculture, which not only aims at creating tree-love and tree-consciousness among the common man, but also in raising trees wherever it is possible to do so.

12. In the end, let me say that I have been very much impressed not only by the excellent standard of instruction maintained at this College, but also by the good physical standard attained by the outgoing officers. I earnestly hope that this institution will develop further and the students passing out from the College will be equal to the task ahead of them. One particular aspect of the development of this institution deserves special notice. I have learnt with great satisfaction that a Regional Training Centre for Foresters is going to be instituted at this College. The need for the training of subordinate forest personnel can scarcely be emphasised. It is to be hoped that the adjoining States will take the fullest advantage of this new wing of the College. Local schools, however efficiently run, are unable to develop a broad and integrated outlook and an *esprit de corps* among the field

workers, to the extent possible in a combined regional institution. I hope that the scope of this College will be further extended in due course to include forest research, and that every effort will be made to develop it as the Dehra Dun of the South.

13. Let me now congratulate you, the students, on successfully completing your training. You have learnt here to work together and live together in a spirit of co-operation and I hope you will carry this torch of comradeship and helpfulness which has been lit here forward through your lives. You must expect to encounter difficulties and hardships, for the duties of a Forest Officer are multifarious, arduous and irksome, but you must not give way but prove yourselves worthy of the trust put in you. I hope you will be inspired by a passion to serve the people among whom your lot may be cast. However great the intellectual, the academic and technical qualifications one may possess, the highest qualification one should have, is the spirit of service which, I dare say, you possess in its fullness and abundance. I wish you all godspeed and luck in the life you are entering today and earnestly hope you will prove worthy of the great institution to which you belong.

14. Before concluding my address, permit me to thank my friend Sri Chaturvedi, the Inspector-General of Forests and your President, Sri Ranganathan, who kindly invited me to this function. I would be failing in my duty if I don't thank the Principal and staff of the College and all those who are present here today and have listened to me patiently all along.

JAI HIND !